



Degree Program in BI - Luiss Joint MSc in Marketing

Course of Customer Value Analytics

The Impact of Brand Storytelling Strategies on Brand Authenticity and Consumer Trust

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Abstract

This research investigates the influence of different types of storytelling strategies (authentic vs. fabricated) on consumer trust and brand authenticity. It explores whether brand storytelling directly impacts consumer trust, using two surveys where participants were exposed to two different brand stories: one authentic and detailed, and the other lacking storytelling elements and fabricated. Additionally, it explores the role of brand authenticity as a mediator in the relationship between brand storytelling and consumer trust. The results highlight the differences between the two surveys and consumer skepticism, which have significant implications for brands today. This study provides a theoretical understanding of brand storytelling, brand authenticity, and consumer trust and offers practical examples of how brands can implement effective brand storytelling strategies.

Keywords: *Storytelling, Brand Story, Authenticity, Trust, Authentic, Fabricated, Skepticism*

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1.0 Introduction

1.1 *Relevance and Managerial Issues*

The ancient skill of storytelling has evolved from something people told to one another. Today, in a world of digitalization and social media, it has become a crucial element in marketing (Moin, 2020). Storytelling has thus become an efficient tactic for creating a strong brand identity. It is frequently based on a brand's values, mission, or history to convey its message to customers. According to research, businesses make their brands appear more "human" by using storytelling to give them a relatable and authentic feel that appeals to their target audience (Khanna, 2023). Therefore, today, narratives are being employed as a whole in brand strategy (Moin, 2020).

Social media and digitalization have changed the way businesses interact with their consumers. The focus now is more on what the brand offers than the actual goods. It is all about the experiences companies produce, which provide consumers with tales to share (Moin, 2020). Individuals are naturally drawn to stories and find them more accessible to recall than facts, leading to the discovery that brand stories can foster favorable brand associations (Lundqvist et al., 2013). Furthermore, it is noteworthy that perceived brand authenticity has been demonstrated to favorably impact brand trust (Huang & Guo, 2021). In today's digitally connected world, trust is essential in online brand communities. Trust influences critical elements such as word-of-mouth and repurchase intention, leading to increased customer loyalty (Anaya-Sánchez et al., 2020). However, the digital era also revealed an increase in brand crises, frequently brought on by social media use. Trust is crucial because of the potential short – and long–term consequences on consumers and brands (Hansen et al., 2018). In order to stand out in marketing, a brand story must be engaging and aid in the consumer's understanding, relatability, and emotional connection to the brand (Huang & Gio, 2021).

Many businesses we are all familiar with employ storytelling as a marketing tactic. Coca-Cola and Apple are two companies that have successfully included storytelling in their marketing campaigns. Disney is another company that excels at storytelling (Killip, 2023). The analysis of the jewelry brand PANDORA, which incorporates a backstory into each piece of jewelry (Dias & Cavalheiro, 2022), is one example that will be explored and covered further in detail later. In marketing, using stories explains things to customers and helps them understand why they should care. This idea can be expressed using various media, including billboards and social media, and represented through images, videos, text, and voiceovers (Killip, 2023).

Several techniques must be implemented for effective brand management. To maximize their strategy, managers need to understand how well-known topics relate to one another. Furthermore, storytelling has a special place in brand communications. By crafting relevant storylines, brands can improve customer engagement, emotional connection, and loyalty (Dominique-Ferreira et al., 2022). Researchers can understand consumer behavior and decision-making by examining the interplay between trust, authenticity, and storytelling. Marketers can use this information to determine which narratives and messaging will most effectively capture and persuade their target audience.

This study investigates how different types of brand storytelling strategies influence consumer trust and brand authenticity. The findings will be valuable for businesses that want to use storytelling to enhance their reputation and strengthen customer relationships. For example, brands might concentrate more on creating engaging brand narratives, developing the storytelling skills of their employees, or leveraging online channels to share their stories with a larger audience. However, the results of this study may help managers recognize possible difficulties in their existing storytelling tactics and take practical steps to resolve them.

1.2 Research Question to be Addressed

Storytelling has not only emerged but has established itself as a powerful tool in the constantly changing field of brand management (Jenkins, 2024). It effectively helps businesses communicate their identity, values, and mission by telling a story that engages consumers and fosters trust and authenticity (Adobe Express, 2024).

This thesis poses the following research question:

"How do different brand storytelling strategies influence brand authenticity and consumer trust?"

The importance of the research question lies in its investigation of the strategic role of storytelling in brand management and its influence on customer trust and brand authenticity.

1.3 Research Goals

The study's primary goal is to discover how different brand storytelling techniques influence brand authenticity and consumer trust. The study aims to identify the critical components essential for building consumer trust and establishing authenticity by examining businesses' storytelling strategies. The goal is to determine if an impactful brand narrative can enhance a brand's authenticity and build consumer trust. However, a weak brand story may have the opposite effect, potentially losing consumer trust. This study aims to investigate whether the quality of a brand story significantly influences consumers' perceptions of brand authenticity and, in turn, their trust in the brand.

Furthermore, the study aims to enhance the understanding of brand authenticity within the framework of brand storytelling. The research examines how brands create and convey authentic stories to identify the elements affecting consumers' views of authenticity. Nevertheless, the study thus seeks to evaluate the interplay between consumer trust and brand storytelling dynamics. Through empirical investigation, it aims to uncover how storytelling strategies influence consumer trust, identifying factors that bolster or diminish trust in brand narratives.

One key outcome of this study is to provide advice for marketers and brands. The findings will be translated into practical recommendations that aim to assist businesses in enhancing the authenticity of their brand narratives and fostering trust with consumers. Additionally, the study seeks to advance a theoretical understanding of branding and consumer behavior, enriching scholarly dialogue and paving the way for further research.

1.4 Structure of the Work

The following chapter offers an overview of the managerial relevance of brand storytelling, supported by statistical data and examples through different brand storytelling instances. The chapter explores storytelling within the jewelry industry, specifically focusing on the PANDORA case study, and highlights emerging trends in brand storytelling. This chapter also includes the effects of improper brand storytelling, providing instances of unsuccessful brand storytelling campaigns. Furthermore, it discusses the importance of brand storytelling for companies, consumers, and stakeholders.

Chapter 2 delves into the theoretical background of brand storytelling and research on digital platforms' role in storytelling. It further investigates the concepts of brand authenticity and consumer trust. Additionally, the chapter outlines existing gaps in current research, the research question, and its contribution to existing literature. Lastly, it proposes hypotheses with a conceptual model.

The third chapter outlines the research methodology employed in the study, including the research design, the approach taken for the empirical analysis, and the sampling used.

The following chapters present the results of the two surveys that were analyzed in SPSS and the empirical findings obtained through the research process. The results are interpreted and placed within a larger theoretical framework in the discussion chapter. It highlights the significance of the study, offers managerial and theoretical implications based on the findings, discusses limitations encountered throughout this study, and recommends directions for future research. Lastly, a conclusion that presents the key findings of the study.

2.0 Chapter 1: Managerial Relevance

2.1 Phenomenon: Brand Storytelling

Stories have always been a part of people's lives. Stories are a way to share emotions and connect with others. Just as individuals use stories to show who they are and express their values, companies do the same. Companies define "who they are" and "what they stand for" through their stories. It is a way for people and businesses to paint a picture of themselves and create meaningful connections (Paquette et al., 2017). Storytelling is a timeless and universal practice that crosses cultures and spans the depths of history. Before there were written words, there was storytelling. It is rooted in every culture and age group. Its purpose remains multidimensional: to entertain, educate, and perpetuate cultural heritage and values (National Geographic, n.d.). In essence, storytelling effectively uses narratives to communicate, appreciate, and leverage individual knowledge. It involves formulating ideas, beliefs, personal experiences, and wisdom, triggering emotions and insight through strategic storytelling (Serrat, 2017).

Crafting a story is an art form; we easily recognize a captivating story when we hear one. Stories allow us to engage ourselves in intense experiences without physically undergoing them. They provide a glimpse into the world, preparing us for what is coming (Peterson, 2027). According to Ana Andjelic, stories are foundational for brands. They transform products and services from commodities into meaningful choices. Brands crafted from compelling stories give products significance beyond their functional attributes. Even when products are similar, a well-told brand story can influence consumers to choose one product over another, even if it costs more. We often pay extra for a product because it helps us stand out and feel unique. Without stories, brands would not exist (Rocca, 2024).

Today, storytelling has integrated itself into the fabric of our social existence, evolving from the era of cave paintings to the digital age of computer screens (Moin, 2020). Stories have the power to inspire and educate, but they also hold the potential to manipulate and harm. Therefore, it is crucial to foster a culture of truthful storytelling (Gottschall, 2022). According to Nakhil (2019), storytelling is about connecting with the audience on a mental and emotional level by sharing values and beliefs. Rather than promoting new products and services, the goal is to engage consumers in the brand's narrative. Stories can resonate and leave a lasting impression, touching people's hearts and staying in their minds. Storytelling is essential when understanding and making sense of our world. Through stories, we shape and explore our truths and beliefs while understanding how they relate to others (Peterson, 2017).

Storytelling offers advantages over traditional organizational communication methods such as emails and reports. It makes it easier to communicate complex emotions in comparison to factual information, offering a platform to share knowledge that is often difficult to explain (Serrat, 2017). Storytelling is more than simply selling products, as it involves crafting a captivating narrative that elevates products from mere commodities to essential elements of a consumer's lifestyle. For example, a brand that shares its humble beginnings or emphasizes its skilled craftsmanship can establish a deep bond with its audience. This

relationship strengthens its authenticity and relatability, which are valuable qualities in brand communication today (Nycz, 2024).

According to Lee et al. (2016), storytelling theory encompasses two relevant frameworks: story theory and narrative theory. Smith and Licht (2014) define a *story* as “*an inner human resource for making meaning*” and outline three interconnected aspects of story theory: international dialog, which entails engagement; connecting oneself in relation; and creating ease. These facets converge in the statement, “*Story is a narrative happening of connecting with self-in-relation through international dialogue to create ease.*” Moreover, Fisher (1984) proposes that narrative theory is based on the idea that humans naturally perceive and interpret their experiences as ongoing narratives. Fisher presents three fundamental components of narrative theory: transportation, identification, and influence (Lee et al., 2016).

Storytelling has gathered interest from marketing researchers due to its persuasive influence. It encompasses various domains influencing marketing strategy, brand philosophy, consumer psychology, and behavior. Moreover, it extensively addresses branding, advertising, and sales aspects such as brand promotion, product placement, and the dynamics between consumers and brands (Moin, 2020). Storytelling has an emotional and even profound impact in addition to being cognitive. Stories connect people to larger visions for the future, providing purpose and fostering connections among individuals (Dias & Cavaleiro, 2022).

2.2 Statistical Data on Brand Storytelling

Storytelling in marketing has proven to be a powerful tool, significantly enhancing product perceived value, sometimes up to 2,706% (Yaqub, 2024). Nevertheless, storytelling is found to have a trust-inducing power (Monarth, 2014). When companies use storytelling in their marketing efforts, they witness a 4% increase in consumer trust and connections. This strategy severely influences purchasing decisions, with 68% of consumers admitting that brand stories influence what they buy (Yaqub, 2024).

It has been found that a compelling brand story has the power to enhance the attractiveness for consumers (Hofman-Kohlmeyer, 2017). Notably, companies adept at creating compelling brand narratives experience a considerable 20% surge in consumer loyalty. The impact of storytelling is in its capacity to increase the recall of information, with stories being up to 22 times more likely to stick in people’s minds than mere facts. Surveys reveal that over half of consumers express openness to purchasing from a brand after engaging with a captivating story, underlining the importance of a narrative in driving consumer behavior. Furthermore, 92% of consumers express a desire for ads that feel like stories, demonstrating a clear preference for this form of marketing communication. In essence, 75% of consumers believe brands should leverage storytelling in their marketing activities, highlighting its undeniable significance in today’s competitive landscape (Yaqub, 2024).

Older consumers strongly prefer comedy, with 57% of consumers aged 55 and over and 43% of those aged 35 and over indicating that they prefer humorous content. Interestingly, humor also resonated with younger demographics (Bogwasi, 2023). Consumers often share their experiences with new and exceptional

digital encounters, highlighting the ease of interactions. However, they also recount instances when interactions fall short. Platforms like review sites, online forums, and social media significantly amplify the impact of these storytelling experiences. As a result, in March 2021, nearly 80% of online purchases globally were left unfinished or abandoned, according to a report from Statista (Dunbar, 2022).

Moreover, 82% of consumers prefer brands whose values align with their own, often opting against purchasing from brands whose ideologies conflict with their own (Rocca, 2024). Authenticity in brand storytelling is crucial for effective messaging. Research indicates that 86% of consumers prioritize authenticity when choosing which brands to connect with. The audience desires assurance that the brand is genuine, empathizes with their concerns, and embodies its messages (DePino, 2024).

2.3 Examples of Brand Storytelling

Several brands are well-known for their storytelling strategies, showcasing the diverse ways a narrative can elevate brand perception and engagement. The following examples are strategies from renowned brands, illustrating how storytelling is a powerful marketing tool.

Firstly, Apple's "1984" Super Bowl ad went beyond mere product promotion by presenting a hero's journey, resonating deeply with audiences and embedding the brand within cultural memory. Similarly, Spotify uses data storytelling to give subscribers unique insights into their music tastes with its yearly "Spotify Wrapped" campaign. This provides users with personalized insights into their music preferences, fostering a sense of connection and community among its listeners. Furthermore, Coca-Cola's association with Santa Claus for over 90 years has become synonymous with joy and magic during the holiday season. This example demonstrates the enduring power of strategic storytelling to evoke emotion and nostalgia. Likewise, Nike's "Just Do It" slogan goes beyond simple marketing rhetoric, serving as a powerful motivational mantra that inspires individuals to take action and strive for success (DePino, 2024).

The luxury brand Gucci has strongly committed to narrative-driven engagement through various initiatives. Establishing a dedicated stories section on its website allows Gucci to share compelling global brand narratives, fostering deeper connections with its audience. In 2021, Gucci introduced Gucci Fest, a week-long film festival that served as a creative expression and storytelling platform, further setting the brand's cultural relevance. Building on this momentum, Gucci Cosmos was unveiled in 2023 – a traveling exhibit that showcases the brand's rich heritage and values through immersive installations, captivating narratives, and archival artifacts (Rocca, 2024).

These diverse examples underscore how effective brand storytelling extends beyond product promotion. It is a potent tool for forging emotional connections and fostering brand loyalty, thus boosting conversations and ultimately increasing revenue (Hattar, 2022).

2.4 Storytelling in the Jewelry Industry

Jewelry brands are an excellent illustration of effective brand storytelling due to their products' significant emotional value. Jewelry pieces evoke feelings of desire and romance as they symbolize love, commitment, and cherished moments. By skillfully creating narratives around their products, jewelry brands establish deep emotional connections with customers, increasing the likelihood of engagement with the brand (Lionsrobet, 2022). Jewelry brands typically sell an aspirational lifestyle rather than just products. By associating their pieces with desired experiences, jewelry brands cultivate a sense of aspiration and exclusivity (ArkTop, 2023), enhancing their appeal and distinctiveness in the market.

A report done on visual storytelling in brand identity for jewelry brands identified that in a crowded market, it is essential to distinguish themselves and leave a lasting impression. Visual storytelling empowers these brands to forge a unique and memorable visual persona, differentiating them from competitors (Centric, 2023). Beyond its aesthetic appeal, jewelry carries deep symbolism. It has the power to narrate tales, mark important moments, or symbolize connection to individuals. Jewelry, therefore, embodies meaning and goes beyond its role as a simple accessory by helping wearers connect to special moments and personal relationships (Moffett, 2024).

In exploring storytelling marketing within the jewelry industry, brands have woven narratives into their campaigns. For example, Cartier launched an IGTV (Instagram TV) campaign titled: “#CartierStoriesByYou,” featuring real stories from Cartier’s sales advisors communicating customer experiences in their stories. This approach shifts the focus from the jewelry to the people and their narratives, humanizing the brand and emphasizing Cartier’s role in fostering connections. Similarly, David Yurman utilizes influencer marketing, collaborating with popular Instagram and YouTube personalities in beauty, fashion, and lifestyle to showcase how their jewelry can complement diverse styles. Additionally, Bvlgari partnered with Vouge Magazine to create a Mother’s Day film highlighting the special bond between a mother and daughter (Bhargava, 2023). Through these storytelling initiatives, brands authentically convey value and evoke emotion, forging strong connections with their customers and distinguishing themselves in a competitive landscape (DePino, 2024).

2.5 PANDORA Case Study

A case study on the brand PANDORA highlights its effective use of storytelling in advertising and communication strategies and inserting narratives within its product line. PANDORA distinguishes itself by integrating storytelling not only in its advertisements but also within its products. This approach, known as product narrative, is a form of storytelling that does not just promote products or brands but enhances their value. The brand’s motto, “unforgettable moments,” embodies the belief that a woman’s uniqueness stems from the personal, memorable moments she experiences – the stories of her life. Consequently, PANDORA’s marketing revolves around these personal narratives and the special moments that define each woman (Dias & Cavalheiro, 2022).

According to the brand's website, PANDORA's mission is to offer women a selection of high-quality jewelry that features handmade finishing, modern design, and affordable prices. This aims to empower women to express their individuality. Each piece of PANDORA jewelry features a unique design that either evokes a specific narrative or enables consumers to interpret the piece within the context of their own life stories, occasions, moments, or relationships (Dias & Cavaleiro, 2022).

All participants in the study expressed that PANDORA allows them to showcase various facets of their identity, facilitated by the wide range of pieces available for personalization. Additionally, the participants noted that their self-image aligns with the brand's image. In terms of self-expression, they highlight how the brand aids in conveying both their personality and life story. Despite not paying too much attention to advertising, all participants recognize storytelling in PANDORA's marketing efforts, acknowledging it as a pivotal factor in capturing their interest. They primarily attribute their affinity for PANDORA to the shared values that resonate deeply with their ideals. Furthermore, participants emphasized that storytelling fosters identification with the brand, enabling self-expression, fostering a sense of community belonging, and enhancing perceived value in products and brands. This connection is reinforced by PANDORA's customizable products, which are closely intertwined with concepts of self-expression and identity (Dias & Cavaleiro, 2022).

2.6 Brand Storytelling Trends

Companies increasingly use data to shape their storytelling efforts, allowing them to create more personalized and relevant narratives for their target audience (Astre, 2023). Social media platforms are now essential for brand storytelling, enabling businesses to engage with their followers and share their stories (Smith, 2024). Beyond simply telling a brand's story, social media is an essential source of audience insights. Brands use these insights to build connections, refine narratives, and influence marketing strategies and brand perception (Digital Marketing Institute, 2017). One trend is the growing importance of social and environmental responsibility. Today's customers demand that businesses deliver quality products or services and contribute positively to society. Companies that successfully convey their social and environmental efforts gain a competitive advantage by aligning with the principles held by their customers (Andersson, 2024).

Another notable trend is the rise in interactive and immersive storytelling. Technology allows businesses to craft more captivating brand stories. For instance, virtual reality creates immersive brand experiences that engage consumers (Andersson, 2024). Brands also empower their customers to share their stories, aiming to cultivate trust and deepen the bond between the brand and its audience (Digital Marketing Institute, 2017). An article by De Fina (2016) explores how technology has influenced storytelling, altering narratives' creation and reception. It underscores the value of consumer involvement, mainly through interactive blogs where comments are encouraged. The findings indicate a notable increase in audience engagement and reflection in comments, as participants interact more with the storytelling environment than the story itself.

Lastly, personalization is crucial in brand storytelling. Today's consumers seek personalized experiences that are tailored to their preferences. Brands that personalize their narratives to connect with diverse audience segments forge deeper connections and achieve greater success (Andersson, 2024).

2.7 Repercussions of Improper Brand Storytelling

Compelling storytelling sheds light on a product's value proposition and aids consumers in understanding its components, assessing its advantages, and its suitability. However, many brands struggle to craft compelling narratives. Christopher Newman, a marketing assistant professor at The University of Mississippi, notes that consumers are most receptive to brand stories when their decisions are driven by emotion rather than rationality (Talbot, 2018).

A common mistake in brand storytelling is centering the narrative around the product instead of the consumer. A successful narrative focuses on facilitating consumer achievements and embodying the brand's core values. Conversely, weak brand narratives often appeal to inconsistent or conflicting values. For instance, the "Not Your Father's Oldsmobile" campaign deviated from established brand values, resulting in a marketing misstep (Herkert, 2022). Moreover, brands that fail to construct authentic and genuine narratives that connect their employees and consumers to a brighter future risk experiencing a downfall (Howell, 2019). A prime example is Pepsi's 2017 advertisement, where the brand's attempt to use a tense social situation backfired, ultimately ruining the brand's image (Lucid Narratives, 2019).

A brand's story's lack of authenticity can significantly damage customer trust (Herkert, 2022). Many companies now recognize the importance of storytelling in driving business growth. However, mistakes in brand storytelling, such as misunderstanding its essence, believing there is only one narrative, or failing to define the brand clearly, can hinder growth (Dolan, 2021). Another factor to consider is the risk of overexposure. Research suggests that half of Americans feel overwhelmed by excessive ads, which can negatively impact their perception of a brand (Gumas, 2023).

Stereotypes pose a significant threat to brand narratives, as they often perpetuate oversimplified ideas that fail to capture the complexities of truth. The authenticity of a brand might be damaged by such narratives supported by biased stories (Choy, 2024). Even the most genuine brand story may fall flat if it lacks personal relevance to the consumer (Talbot, 2018). Therefore, crafting brand narratives requires skill, as narratives perceived as irrelevant or unauthentic can easily backfire as mere marketing ploys.

2.8 Importance for Companies & Consumers

Research has demonstrated that storytelling in marketing goes beyond influencing purchases; it also establishes new connections, bridges the gap between consumers and brands, and creates intimacy (Crespo et al., 2023).

Marketers use brand stories to connect with customers, leveraging the power of storytelling to convey product meanings. A brand story serves as a medium for communicating the significance of products and brands to consumers. In essence, brand stories create images in customers' minds, capturing their attention and focusing them on the intended message (Hofman-Kohlmeyer, 2017). Compelling brand

storytelling is crucial in fostering the connection between consumers and brands. This underlines the importance for managers to prioritize the development of captivating brand narratives that provoke emotional responses, thereby elevating the consumer-brand relationship (Crespo et al., 2023).

Moreover, marketers can use the power of storytelling to forge deeper connections with customers, stir emotions, foster engagement, and ultimately shape purchasing decisions (Júnior et al., 2023). To excel at storytelling, it is essential to grasp how loyal consumers perceive the brand. This requires a strong understanding of the target audience's values and desires, enabling brands to craft a narrative that resonates with both the brand's and the consumer's aspirations and needs (Nycz, 2024). Crespo et al. (2023) further emphasize that storytelling in marketing employs narrative techniques to promote brands. This narrative structure organizes information in a way that audiences find relatable, aiding them in making connections and drawing conclusions.

Moin (2020) emphasizes that storytelling is crucial for fostering brand engagement, cultivating brand attachment, and nurturing brand affinity (Moin, 2020). Additionally, it enhances consumers' cognitive reactions by fostering consumer-brand identification and evoking emotional responses (Crespo et al., 2023). Customers often choose a brand because they relate to its ideas and values. When a brand's stories align with a consumer's beliefs, its products become essential for expressing their identity. In sociology, this connection is called self-congruence, the strongest emotional tie between a consumer and a brand (Rocca, 2024).

Moreover, brand storytelling transcends consumer relations to influence organizational behavior, impacting organizational values and shaping organizational identity, image, and reputation. A paradigm shift is evident in how storytelling now influences marketing communications, brand strategies, and the contemporary perception of storytelling in marketing (Moin, 2020). As consumer trust declines, storytelling becomes a potent tool for brands to communicate and demonstrate accountability for their actions (Rocca, 2024).

A narrative structure in consumer engagement effectively activates cognitive and emotional faculties, facilitating information retention and forging emotional bonds. Storytelling has the power to provoke action by eliciting behavioral responses. Employing storytelling as a brand communication strategy cultivates robust and positive consumer-brand relationships, heightening the efficacy of marketing communications and fostering consumer brand affinity. Effective brand storytelling fosters connections between consumers and the brand, enriching marketing communications (Crespo et al., 2023). By cultivating empathy and identification, brands can forge a deep emotional bond with their audience. This bond enhances brand likability, trust, and loyalty (Philips, 2023).

2.9 Importance for Other Stakeholders

Brand storytelling shifts the focus from merely promoting products and services to crafting experiences that resonate deeply with customers. It integrates elements of narrative philosophy, consumer psychology, and branding research. Digital technology and social media changes have transformed storytelling into a crucial component of today's marketing strategies (Moin, 2020). In the context of branding, co-creation thrives

through stakeholder participation, collaboration, and the exchange of ideas. In this process, storytelling is essential because it facilitates the emergence of several meanings from the perspective of different stakeholders. However, top-down storytelling campaigns risk generating conflicting brand interpretations (Stoica et al., 2021).

Storytelling holds profound importance across various professions and organizations, engaging stakeholders emotionally and enabling them to grasp complex concepts while fostering memorable and relatable experiences. Through the active involvement of stakeholders in brand associations and narratives, storytelling increases customer value and satisfaction with the destination, enhancing overall engagement and connection (Daniel, 2023). In the academic realm, brand storytelling effectively communicates the story behind a brand, helping academic societies foster strong relationships, establish distinctive identities, and gain a competitive edge (Singh, 2023). Nevertheless, corporate storytelling encompasses associations, personality traits, activities, and values, all of which significantly shape the perceptions of the corporate brand among internal stakeholders. When executed effectively, storytelling cultivates alignment and emotional connections among employees, strengthening the brand's identity and fostering a sense of belonging to the organization (Nyagadza et al., 2020).

This study will investigate how brand storytelling strategies influence brand authenticity and consumer trust. In our fast-paced world, where attention is scarce and consumers are bombarded with brand messages, brands that craft compelling stories stand out to create meaningful connections (Avery, 2020). Understanding how storytelling impacts brand authenticity and consumer trust is crucial for businesses, as it sheds light on how their narratives shape perceptions and relationships with their audiences.

3.0 Chapter 2: Theoretical Background

3.1 Brand Storytelling

In today's competitive landscape, companies must do more than offer a quality product to set themselves apart; they must tell a story (Paquette et al., 2017). Storytelling marketing transcends providing mere facts or details; it stands out as the most potent method for conveying a message. Its power lies in its simplicity, memorability, and ability to evoke deep emotional engagement and empathy (Kim et al., 2018). Previous studies have shown that brand storytelling helps build strong brands and encourages brand loyalty due to its influence on consumers, ability to entertain them, and leaving a lasting impression (Hong et al., 2022). Moreover, research indicates that presenting information in narrative form tends to diminish skepticism among consumers, reducing the tendency to argue against it (Avery, 2020). Hopkinson and Hogarth-Scott (2001) explain that a story in narrative form describes a real or fictional event in logical order. This type of story builds realism through carefully chosen descriptive language to make it sound authentic (Paquette et al., 2017).

Nevertheless, it is found that human memory operates on a story-based framework at the individual level, with information organized, stored, and recalled in the form of narratives. Additionally, at a social level, stories play a crucial role in making our lives understandable to others by providing structure with a clear beginning, middle, and end (Delgado-Ballester & Fernandez-Sabiote, 2016). Despite these benefits, the components that create a compelling brand narrative and the circumstances in which storytelling enhances a brand's value remain unclear (Hofman-Kohlmeyer, 2017).

Stories are discovered to captivate audiences more effectively and are easier to understand than facts, often resulting in a more favorable reception. This leads to affect transfer, wherein positive feelings toward the story are transferred to the brand, enhancing the credibility and influence of the storyteller compared to other communication methods (Avery, 2020). Past studies indicate that consumers react differently to various forms of brand storytelling. When stories originate from authentic consumer experiences, individuals are more inclined to share them and view the brand as favorable. Conversely, consumer engagement diminishes when stories are perceived as crafted solely for advertising and sales purposes (Hong et al., 2022). A well-crafted brand story can strengthen perceptions of brand authenticity and trust, essential factors influencing consumer loyalty. Furthermore, authentic brand storytelling involves genuine brand content that significantly impacts consumer perceptions and lays the foundation for establishing lasting relationships and trust (Huang & Guo, 2021).

A study by Kumar et al. (2023) emphasizes the importance of purpose-driven storytelling and emotional branding in building a sense of community and shared identity among consumers, leading to long-term brand loyalty. The study highlights the significance of crafting strategic narratives tailored to the audience's preferences for a more personalized and impactful engagement approach. Marketers should prioritize authentic and relatable storytelling to boost consumer engagement and strengthen brand loyalty. Moin (2020) discovered that brands frequently face challenges in forging emotional connections with their

audience. This is primarily because storytelling often appeals solely to rationality, overlooking emotional engagement. Furthermore, inconsistency in brand storytelling can lead to confusion and mistrust. Some brands prioritize telling consumers what they think they want to hear rather than staying authentic, thereby compromising their brand's credibility (Moin, 2020).

Start with a story of overcoming challenges to inspire, convince, or leave a lasting impression. Such tales resonate with people, engaging their minds and touching their hearts (Zak, 2014). Moreover, Sax (2006) and Shankar et al. (2001) proposed that storytelling offers a framework for organizing experiences and attributing significance to them. Stories help consumers interpret the meaning of brands (Lundqvist et al., 2013). It has been found that storytelling makes people feel connected to the brand. Storytelling fosters engagement behaviors, yet it also perpetuates harmful speech. Consumers interpret both positive and negative emotions, contributing to the formation of meaningful connections with brands. Emotions evoked by storytelling narratives can influence how the brand or products are perceived, potentially affecting the likelihood of repeat purchases. Nonetheless, storytelling does not always evoke an emotional reaction, and consumers can distinguish between good and bad narratives (Júnior et al., 2023).

According to McKee (2003), ineffective stories lack depth and coherence, while successful ones feature well-defined characters, conflicts, and dynamic plotlines (Júnior et al., 2023). Research has found that consumers often approach ads with skepticism. Koslow (2000) notes that this skepticism is a defense mechanism against potentially misleading marketing tactics. When consumers doubt the accuracy of brand stories, they may become disengaged from advertisements altogether. Researchers argue that brand stories must be authentic and believable due to consumer sensitivity and awareness (Yin et al., 2023).

An article studying Spanish brands found that storytelling is not widely utilized as a form of communication, with only 47 out of 189 Spanish companies and brands (25%) incorporating it. These findings suggest that storytelling may be more beneficial for distinguishing consumer product brands rather than those of more professional products. Nevertheless, previous research has indicated that storytelling can effectively enhance corporate branding in business-to-business sectors (Delgado-Ballester & Fernandez-Sabot, 2016).

A Harvard Business Review article emphasizes that our brains naturally favor storytelling over other types of content. Narratives stimulate the release of oxytocin, a hormone linked with trust. This analysis highlights that storytelling is effective because it mirrors how our brains comprehend information. While facts are received as data points, stories weave connections between them. When introduced to a new story, we not only appreciate it but also imbue it with emotions. Unlike facts and statistics, a story has the power to inspire and motivate (Boris & Peterson, 2018).

Furthermore, a Forbes article states that most of our interaction with the world revolves around narratives. Additionally, we construct personal narratives to rationalize our decisions, whether in our interactions with others or in our brand choices (Dunbar, 2022). A recent report from the consulting firm PwC revealed that approximately one in three customers will abandon a brand they once "loved" following

just one negative experience (PwC, n.d.). Recognizing the power of storytelling and understanding the motivations behind our decisions are pivotal in cultivating customer loyalty and trust (Dunbar, 2022).

Research in the field of neuroeconomics demonstrates that our brains produce cortisol, a stress hormone, during tense moments in stories, which helps us focus. Conversely, when a resolution occurs, such as encountering an animal, oxytocin is released, promoting empathy and connection. Moreover, a positive ending in stories triggers the limbic system, releasing dopamine, which boosts hope and optimism (Monarth, 2014). In the field of neuroscience, it has been discovered that brain regions not typically associated with “language networks” become consistently activated when people listen to stories (Martinez-Conde et al., 2019).

The most accomplished storytellers can captivate their audience’s attention by countering their narratives around a singular, profound concept. This timeless essence of storytelling makes it a potent tool (Monarth, 2014). Research indicates that consumers favor brands whose personalities align with their ideal traits. Additionally, Melin (2002) suggests that the process of selecting brands closely resembles the process of choosing friends (Paquette, 2017). Through storytelling, marketers have a powerful tool to connect their brand with customers, stirring emotions, driving engagement, and influencing purchasing choices. Compelling narratives should weave in elements like conflict, authenticity, and entertainment to seize the audience’s attention and forge emotional bonds (Júnior et al., 2023). For instance, in the jewelry industry, successful brands often craft stories around characters, whether it is the founder’s journey, the craftsmanship process, or the wearer’s experiences. These narratives cultivate authenticity, enabling customers to relate to the characters and fostering deeper brand loyalty (Lionsorbet, 2024).

Previous literature proposes four essential elements for a compelling brand story: authenticity, conciseness, reversal, and humor. However, the presence of these elements varies significantly across different stories, suggesting that managers prioritize some aspects over others. This diversity implies that there is no universal story design suitable for all companies and brands. Authenticity, in particular, stands out as a crucial element in crafting a compelling narrative (Delgado-Ballester & Fernandez-Sabiote, 2016). Brand storytelling is not merely sharing tales; it is a strategic choice. Brands differentiate themselves by creating compelling stories that connect with their target audience. Consumers recall stories more effectively than facts or features, often opting for products with compelling narratives for authenticity and trustworthiness. In today’s age of information overload, consumers harbor increasing skepticism toward traditional advertising. Storytelling offers an alternative, allowing messages to be subtly conveyed while preserving credibility. Brands that adopt this approach may overcome skepticism and establish trust (Adobe Express, 2024).

3.2 The Role of Digital Platforms in Storytelling

Ensuring alignment of stories with a brand's values, mission, and identity poses a significant challenge. In the digital age, managers must effectively narrate their brand's story across diverse digital platforms. This evolving digital landscape has empowered audiences to shape the brand story's outcome, demanding that marketers understand which stories customers will complete and craft experiences that guide them in that direction. To harness the potential of digital reality, a new storytelling approach might be needed that rearranges narrative elements for this impactful medium (Gross et al., 2019). Storytelling takes precedence as the primary technology of influence among the four in social media, alongside performance, performativities, and mobilities. Social media platforms provide the stage for users to convey their actions, ideas, and self-images through narratives, underscoring the pivotal role of storytelling in connecting with audiences (Lund et al., 2018).

Moin (2020) emphasizes that digitalization has led to a dramatic shift in brand storytelling, placing marketers in the driving seat and leaving consumers to navigate. Nevertheless, the extensive use of social networking sites and interaction in consumer-to-consumer communities influence brand trust. However, the impact of social network sites on brand trust is not immediate and often indirect (Tabish et al., 2022). Through using social media channels for brand storytelling, businesses find opportunities to reinforce their brand values. This strategic use of social media facilitates meaningful interaction and engagement between users and the brand, fostering a deeper connection. Social media storytelling involves exchanging knowledge and meaning through digital platforms, allowing brands and consumers alike to share experiences in impactful ways. These platforms provide storytellers with the necessary tools to convey ordinary life narratives to a larger audience, further enhancing brand visibility and resonance in the digital landscape (Gupta, 2022).

Digital storytelling is a valuable tool for bringing people together to share and discuss ideas about what places mean to different groups. This effort can lead to greater understanding and participation from various stakeholders. With digital storytelling, people and communities have come together by sharing their unique struggles in specific places, facing everyday challenges, introducing new ideas for civic involvement, celebrating shared resources, and affirming a collective identity (Hudak, 2019). Compelling storytelling on social media can wield significant influence, potentially reaching millions and shaping perceptions. Stories entertain and shape our sense of self, values, and worldview. People navigate their place in society by telling stories and participating in discussions that shape understanding and power dynamics (Lund et al., 2018).

Digital storytelling can influence self-perception through continuous reflection and involvement beyond simple self-understanding. While initially associated with personal narratives, the term "digital storytelling" has expanded to encompass various narrative forms in digital spaces, including commercial marketing. Studies indicate that video stories elicit stronger emotional reactions from audiences than text-based narratives. In business settings, digital storytelling is commonly employed to foster a sense of connection and relatability with consumers, utilizing narrative techniques to humanize brands and evoke empathy (Henrickson et al., 2022).

Social media stories differ from traditional posts as they tend to show more casual activities rather than curated content. These stories often deviate from conventional narrative structures, lacking clear beginnings, middles, or ends. Instead, they may consist solely of climatic moments or lack a defined climax altogether. Social media stories offer curated glimpses into everyday life, favoring spontaneous snapshots over carefully crafted narratives (Henrickson et al., 2022). Instagram stands out as the ideal platform for luxury brands aiming to connect with consumers due to its versatile creative features and focus on visual storytelling (Lin & Ku, 2023). According to Lund et al. (2018), destination management organizations are advised not to control consumer reactions on social media. Instead, they should engage with consumers who co-create positive brand stories. By incorporating personal experiences into their communication, destination management organizations can build emotional bonds with consumers and motivate them to join in brand storytelling (Lund et al., 2018). Through digital storytelling, individuals can publicly share their stories, fostering self-reflection and empathy among communities (Hudak, 2019).

While this research does not delve deeply into the details of digital storytelling, its importance in fostering meaningful connections in today's society cannot be overstated. In an increasingly competitive market, digital storytelling is essential to a company's ability to succeed.

3.3 Brand Authenticity and Consumer Trust

In an increasingly open marketplace where access and institutional authority are no longer easily controlled, expertise and authenticity are more crucial than ever (Eggers et al., 2013). The increasing number of brands with similar products, coupled with the rapid imitation of product innovations, has resulted in high levels of brand similarity (Schallehn et al., 2014). Research shows that consumers are seeking brands that are more original, relevant, genuine, and authentic (Kim et al., 2021). Schallehn et al. (2014) define an *authentic brand* as one that is transparent about its values and beliefs, prioritizing its internal identity over chasing temporary trends. Brand authenticity ensures the protection of a brand's heritage and has the potential to yield performance values, thus facilitating higher levels of brand credibility, consumer trust, and willingness to pay (Huang & Guo, 2021). An article by Frtiz et al. (2017) highlights how brand authenticity forms are shaped by factors tied to the brand's history (such as brand heritage and nostalgia), its integrity (like commercialization and social commitment), the dedication of its employees, and how consumers identify with the brand. Additionally, another article suggests that consistency and continuity are crucial for establishing brand authenticity (Schallehn et al., 2014). Portal et al. (2019) imply that brand authenticity is conveyed through any semblance of origins, originality, and uniqueness. From a consumer perspective, authentic brands deliver more personal value than less authentic ones.

A study examining brand authenticity reveals that 86% of consumers prioritize authenticity when selecting brands to support. Furthermore, over half of respondents believe that fewer than half of brands generate meaningful content. The study also reveals that consumers are three times more inclined to perceive content generated by fellow consumers as authentic compared to content produced by brands (Dan, 2017). The findings of this study underscore the significance of word-of-mouth and consumer-to-consumer

interactions, with research examining how consumers rely on their brand experiences through storytelling (Delgado-Ballester & Fernandez-Sabiote, 2016). There is a growing demand for genuine and trustworthy connections between brands and customers, even as overall societal trust declines. Brand authenticity is seen as a critical factor in building credibility and trust. When a brand lacks authenticity, its image does not align with its identity, leading consumers to attribute its promises to external influences rather than its true essence (Schallehn et al., 2014).

As highlighted previously, brand storytelling stands out as an effective tool for cultivating brand authenticity. When brands share stories about their inception, principles, and purpose, they forge an emotional bond with consumers. Authentic stories resonate because of their sincerity and relatability, nurturing trust. Consumers gravitate toward brands that mirror their convictions and principles; authentic storytelling establishes that understanding (Huang & Guo, 2021). Businesses need to share authentic stories because non-authentic ones negatively affect consumers' perceptions of the brand. The level of trust consumers have in the authenticity of advertisements determines how they view them. Emphasizing the truthfulness of content is crucial, as consumers are more likely to be persuaded by authentic stories. Ultimately, authenticity is the cornerstone of brand narratives (Yin et al., 2023).

Each individual seeks the meaning of life and strives for authenticity in alignment with personal aspirations. People are drawn toward brands capable of enhancing the authenticity of their lives and ideal selves. Once a bond with a particular brand is established, favorable word-of-mouth spreads, leading consumers to passionately support their favored brand to uphold the positive connection (Han et al., 2021). Brand specialists frequently advocate authenticity as a crucial competitive advantage and a solution for brands, especially during difficult times when trust declines (Eggers et al., 2013). Nevertheless, as consumers strive harder to find authenticity, they are increasingly emotionally attached to brands that consistently maintain certain features across various product categories (Kim et al., 2021).

Napoli et al. (2014) propose that brand authenticity manifests through diversity and evolves through consumers' varied perceptions, including cultural symbolism, nostalgia, heritage, design consistency, commitment to quality, sincerity, and craftsmanship (Kim et al., 2021). Authentic brands align their business actions and practices with well-defined core values. These core values foster trust and directly impact the company's bottom line (Eggers et al., 2013). In exploring the link between brand authenticity and brand trust within a conceptual framework, researchers have discovered that consumers who strongly perceive authenticity also report significantly higher levels of brand trust than those with weaker perceptions of authenticity. This indicates a correlation between consumer perceptions of a brand's authenticity, brand relationships, and attitude formation (Han et al., 2021). The absence of authentic experiences among international brands further stimulates consumers' desire for authenticity. Disappointment with this reality prompts them to seek alternatives that fulfill their need for authenticity. As consumers' quest for authenticity intensifies, they become more inclined to emotionally connect with brands that consistently embody this trait across different product categories (Assiouras et al., 2015).

It is found that 82% of Gen Z consumers trust brands that incorporate authentic customer images in their advertising. Additionally, 72% prefer companies that actively support social causes. Other trust-building factors include product quality, positive reviews, and exceptional customer service (Bryk, 2023). Eggers et al. (2013) suggest that this phenomenon stems from corporate dissonance, which arises when brands fail to align their actions with communicated promises and values. This discrepancy erodes trust among consumers, who seek out honest and trustworthy brands due to their skepticism towards presented information (Portal et al., 2019). According to Delgado-Ballester (2004), brand trust refers to the assured expectations regarding the reliability and intentions of a brand in situations involving consumer risk. Brand trust is associated with consumers' confidence in a brand's reliability and intentions, while brand reliability hinges on the promised anticipated performance of the brand (Kim et al., 2021).

A report about brand trust and equity underscores consumers' heightened expectations for brands. It highlights that brands aligning with consumer beliefs and values are favored, with 75% of respondents considering trust more crucial than ever. Moreover, the report emphasizes the heightened significance of brand trust among consumers aged 18 to 34. Factors such as culture, purpose, and societal impact hold increasing importance for brands today. Additionally, the pandemic caused a shift in priorities, with attributes like value, customer safety, and employee well-being gaining prominence. At the same time, elements like image, trendiness, and excitement have diminished in significance (Edelman, 2021). According to Turner and Manning (1998), the longing for authenticity becomes particularly pronounced during periods of change and uncertainty as individuals seek something reliable that provides continuity (Fritz et al., 2017).

3.4 Identified Gaps

Research has shown that when products are given a more profound meaning through storytelling, it creates a strong connection to the brand, making customers more loyal and engaged (Dias & Cavaleiro, 2022). Moreover, previous studies in consumer behavior and marketing have emphasized the importance of authenticity and its correlation with perceptions of reality, truthfulness, and genuineness in consumer communication (Kim et al., 2021). Nevertheless, a study by Hernandez-Fernandez and Lewis (2019) found that being unique, staying consistent, and maintaining continuity strongly affects how consumers see a brand. Customers give a brand more value and credibility when they believe it to be authentic. Another article proposes that telling unique and captivating stories can create a positive connection between consumers and brands, making marketing efforts more effective and helping consumers relate to brands (Crespo et al., 2023). This implies that genuine and authentic brand stories can enhance consumers' perceptions of a brand's authenticity and trustworthiness (Huang & Guo, 2021).

Crespo et al. (2023) found that while storytelling can enhance the consumer-brand relationship experience, there is a lack of clarity in measuring its effectiveness as a communication strategy. Existing research often focuses on specific regions and may not fully explore other crucial aspects of brand building, such as loyalty and equity. Furthermore, an article highlights a lack of understanding regarding the strategic

importance of storytelling in strengthening the relationship between consumers and brands (Crespo et al., 2023). Despite significant contributions made over the past 25 years, many aspects of brand authenticity still require further exploration (Södergren, 2021).

The study of brand storytelling has expanded significantly, and it mainly focuses on how storytelling affects branding and influences consumer emotions. However, less attention has been given to how these storytelling theories can work with other concepts (Moin, 2020), such as brand authenticity or consumer trust. The study of brand storytelling is still developing, and there are gaps in understanding how storytelling theories can be integrated with other branding concepts (Moin, 2020). Furthermore, consumer trust, especially in online shopping and smart products, has received considerable attention in research. However, the factors affecting consumer trust can vary significantly depending on the context, declaring further investigation into these complexities (Michler et al., 2020). Additionally, research often focuses on a single industry and may not apply equally well to others (Baakli, 2023). Brand authenticity is a widely studied topic, with researchers identifying up to 40 dimensions (Akbar & Wyler, 2017). Nevertheless, the factors affecting consumer trust can vary depending on the situation, underscoring the need for further research to comprehend these complexities (Soleimani, 2022).

Limited consideration is given to the influence of rhetoric in fostering engagement with a brand narrative, with little research available in this field (Huang & Guo, 2021). Companies need a clearer understanding of the factors influencing brand authenticity and how they impact consumer behavior, especially the relationship between consumers and their brands (Fritz et al., 2017). Additionally, brands frequently struggle to engage with consumers because inconsistent storytelling can cause confusion and disrupt the establishment of a strong consumer-brand relationship (Crespo et al., 2023). This issue needs to be addressed as managers increasingly take back creative control of their brands from advertising agencies, giving them more authority in crafting and narrating their brand stories (Mills & John, 2020).

3.5 Research Question & Contribution

Drawing from prior research, this study aims to explore the relationship between brand storytelling strategies, brand authenticity, and consumer trust. Specifically, the study seeks to understand how the type of storytelling technique impacts perceptions of authenticity and influences consumer trust. Therefore, the following research question is:

"How do different brand storytelling strategies influence brand authenticity and consumer trust?"

The forthcoming research aims to contribute to marketing theory by delving into how storytelling influences brand perception. Understanding these mechanisms can enhance marketing strategies and campaigns, helping brand managers create narratives that genuinely connect with consumers and fostering authenticity, which builds trust and loyalty. Understanding how storytelling shapes consumer perceptions of authenticity and trust offers invaluable insights into the consumer decision-making process and psychology. However, it also raises ethical considerations surrounding transparency and truthfulness in marketing narratives. Brands that effectively use storytelling to cultivate authenticity and trust gain a distinct

competitive advantage in crowded markets. (Longhouse Media, 2023). Recognizing this dynamic can help companies discover their unique identity and stand out from competitors (Farinella, 2024).

Research emphasizes the need for marketing ethics to consider cross-cultural practices amidst globalization, aiming to bridge the gap between social expectations and actual industry behavior (Mutum & Ghazali, 2023). Nevertheless, Moin (2020) notes the shift from traditional bowling to dynamic pinball gaming, driven by the swift progress of digital technology and the widespread integration of social media into various facets of daily life (Moin, 2020). Today, consumers are inundated with targeted advertising messages (Tabish et al., 2022), leading to an overload that poses challenges for brands seeking to distinguish themselves and convey authenticity (Södergren, 2021). As the drivers of brand value evolve, the pivotal role of trust comes to the forefront (Prahalad, 2011). Therefore, brands must craft genuine narratives and foster consumer trust to navigate this dynamic environment effectively.

4.0 Chapter 4: Hypotheses & Conceptual Model

4.1 Hypotheses

This section outlines the hypotheses formulated to investigate the relationship between brand storytelling strategies, brand authenticity, and consumer trust. The hypotheses encompass the direct effect and the mediation effect. They are derived from the theoretical framework provided earlier. Building on established theories in marketing and consumer behavior, these hypotheses suggest that brand storytelling influences consumer trust, mediated by brand authenticity.

4.1.1 Direct Effect Hypothesis (H1)

The first hypothesis proposes that the type of brand storytelling has a direct effect on consumer trust. In particular, it is anticipated that brands employing authentic storytelling strategies will elicit higher consumer trust than those using fabricated storytelling techniques.

Null Hypothesis (H0): There is no direct effect of the type of brand storytelling on consumer trust.

Alternative Hypothesis (HA): There is a direct effect of the type of brand storytelling on consumer trust.

4.1.2 Mediation Hypothesis (H2)

The second hypothesis suggests that brand authenticity mediates the relationship between brand storytelling strategies and consumer trust. It predicts that the effect of brand storytelling on consumer trust will be partially or fully mediated by the perceived authenticity of the brand's narrative.

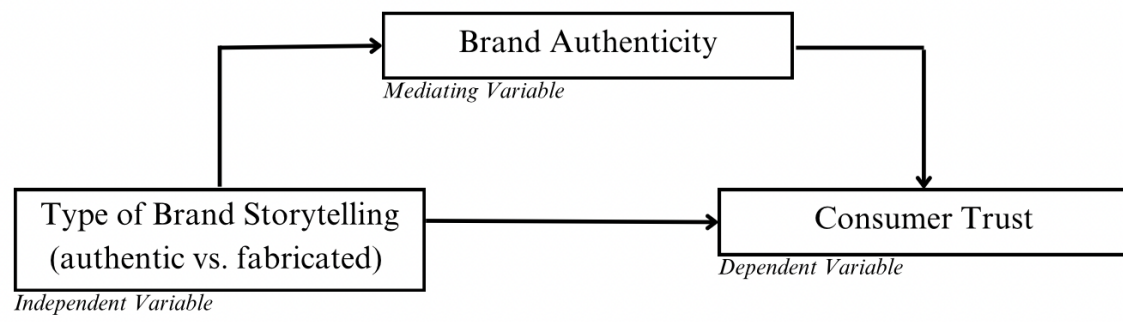
Null Hypothesis (H0): Brand authenticity does not mediate the relationship between the type of brand storytelling and consumer trust.

Alternative Hypothesis (HA): Brand authenticity mediates the relationship between the type of brand storytelling and consumer trust.

4.2 Conceptual Model

This study proposes a conceptual model exploring how the type of brand storytelling strategy (authentic vs. fabricated) influences consumer trust both directly and indirectly, mediated by brand authenticity. The type of brand storytelling strategies (authentic vs. fabricated) is the independent variable, directly impacting consumer trust, while brand authenticity acts as the mediating variable. This model aims to uncover the dynamic relationship between storytelling, authenticity, and trust, offering valuable insights for academia and marketing practice.

Model 1: Conceptual Framework



5.0 Chapter 3: Methodology

5.1 Research Design

A quantitative approach has been chosen to investigate how brand storytelling influences brand authenticity and consumer trust. The ability of quantitative research, which employs a larger, randomly selected sample, to generalize findings to a larger population supports this decision (Rahman, 2020). Specifically, surveys will be conducted using structured questionnaires to collect data. This approach helped identify statistical relationships and patterns, providing a robust understanding of the relationship between brand storytelling, brand authenticity, and consumer trust.

5.2 Data Collection

For this study, data will be collected through a survey-based approach. The survey will utilize a between-subjects design, dividing participants into two distinct groups, where each individual is only exposed to one treatment (Charness et al., 2012). This division aims to facilitate a comparative analysis of the effects of different brand stories on brand authenticity and consumer trust. The survey is based on the hypotheses and conceptual model developed to explore the research objectives. It has been carefully crafted to ensure alignment between the research question and the data collected.

One of two groups will be randomly assigned to each participant. One group (Group A) will be exposed to a brand story that exemplifies strong storytelling techniques. In contrast, the other group (Group B) will receive a brand story featuring weaker storytelling elements. This manipulation allows for examining the impact of varying brand narratives on consumer perceptions.

Following exposure to the respective brand stories, participants will be presented with follow-up questions utilizing a 5-point Likert scale. Responses will range from “Strongly Agree” (1) to “Strongly Disagree” (5), enabling nuanced assessments of participant attitudes (Joshi et al., 2015). The survey is organized into three distinct sections (see Appendix 1 for the whole survey):

1. **Brand Storytelling Strategies:** Participants will respond to three questions assessing their perceptions of the brand story’s narrative elements and effectiveness.
2. **Brand Authenticity:** This section comprises three questions to measure participants’ perceptions of the authenticity of the brand’s narrative and messaging.
3. **Consumer Trust:** Considering the brand story presented, participants will answer three questions about their trust in the brand.

After engaging with the brand stories and follow-up questions, participants will provide demographic information, including age, gender, and location. Gathering demographic data is crucial as the study does not target specific groups or regions, ensuring a varied group of participants for comprehensive analysis. The brand stories presented to the participants were as follows:

Table 1: *Brand Stories shown to participants*

<i>Authentic Brand Story</i>	<i>Fabricated Brand Story</i>
<p>In the heart of Paris, nestled in a charming corner of the city, lies "Bijoux Éternels," a family-owned jewelry brand with a rich history dating back to the 1800s. Each piece of jewelry is carefully handcrafted, embodying the essence of timeless elegance and sophistication.</p> <p>"Bijoux Éternels" is not just about selling jewelry; it is about celebrating life's precious moments. Each gemstone is hand-picked, every design has a backstory, and every piece embodies the brand's dedication to authenticity and quality. The brand believes in transparency and ethical sourcing, ensuring that every gemstone is conflict-free.</p> <p>"Bijoux Éternels" is more than a brand; it is a legacy, a symbol of love and commitment, and a promise of eternal beauty.</p>	<p>Brand X is a company that sells shoes. We have many types of shoes. Our shoes are good. You can wear them on your feet. They come in different sizes. You can buy our shoes online or in stores. We have been selling shoes for a long time. We want to sell more shoes. That's why we make shoes.</p>

The strong and authentic brand story is significantly more detailed, while the weak and fabricated one lacks narrative depth and is relatively straightforward. This comparison aims to determine whether storytelling significantly impacts consumers' perceptions of authenticity and their trust in the brand.

Several measures will be implemented to enhance the reliability and validity of the findings of this study. Firstly, participants will be randomly assigned into groups to mitigate potential biases in group selection. Additionally, using a standardized Likert scale ensures consistency in data collection and facilitates reliable comparisons across responses (Joshi et al., 2015). Before starting the main study, a pre-test was conducted with friends and family members. Twenty-five participants received the survey featuring the authentic brand story, while another twenty-five received a survey with the fabricated brand story. The pre-test helped identify issues with clarity, wording, or response options. Further, SPSS was used to analyze and determine the viability of the acquired data. The primary goal was to gather feedback to identify potential methodological flaws and ensure adherence to scientific standards.

The data were analyzed using SPSS. For hypothesis 1, which focused on the direct effect, descriptive statistics, and reliability analysis were conducted to assess internal consistency (Malhotra et al., 2020). Additionally, to investigate the relationship between the independent variable (type of storytelling) and the dependent variable (consumer trust), a simple linear regression analysis was performed. To test hypothesis 2, which examined the mediating effect, the PROCESS macro procedure developed by Andrew F. Hayes was utilized (Hayes, 2017). This allowed for an examination of how the type of storytelling impacts consumer trust, mediated by brand authenticity. The same procedure was applied to both surveys to facilitate comparison and assess whether the type of brand storytelling influenced participant responses.

Ethical considerations regarding participant confidentiality, anonymity, and informed consent were strictly observed (Bhandari, 2021). Participants were fully informed of the purpose and procedures of the study. They were assured of the confidentiality of their responses throughout the study.

There are some limitations to using this method. Firstly, a regression analysis can suggest a relationship between variables but cannot establish causality. It can only show the association between variables and other factors influencing the observed relationship (DataTAB, n.d.). Additionally, it is crucial to recognize that results from a particular sample may not represent the wider population (Simkus, 2023). A quantitative approach could provide a greater insight into the relationship between authenticity, trust, and type of storytelling, which could support the survey's findings. Nonetheless, the study offers insightful information about whether storytelling affects customer perceptions of brand authenticity and their trust in a brand. These findings are relevant to marketers, brand managers, and professionals in consumer behavior and brand management.

5.3 Sampling

The initial sample included 120 participants in Group A (authentic storytelling) and 101 in Group B (fabricated storytelling). Due to missing data, 8 participants from Group A and 1 from Group B were excluded, resulting in a final sample of 112 for Group A and 100 for Group B. Participants were recruited through the "Collect CloudResearch" platform, receiving \$0.50 for their participation. The age spanned from 18 to 65 and above in both groups, with the majority falling within the 18-24, 25-34, and 35-44 age brackets. Group A comprised 50 males, 61 females and 1 who preferred not to say, while Group B had 50 males and 50 females. The majority of participants were from North America (see Appendixes 5, 6, 7, 11, 12, and 13 for frequency analyses of demographics).

6.0 Chapter 4: Results

6.1 Results

The main objective is to explore how different types of storytelling – authentic versus fabricated – affect brand authenticity and consumer trust. The survey was structured into three sections: brand storytelling, brand authenticity, and consumer trust. Analysis of the survey results focused on two hypotheses. The first hypothesis examines the direct effect of the type of storytelling on consumer trust, and the second investigates whether brand authenticity mediates the relationship between the type of storytelling and consumer trust.

6.1.1 The Authentic Brand Story Study

A descriptive analysis was conducted to outline the key characteristics of the data. The results show that responses to the authentic brand story mainly indicate “strongly agree,” reflecting positive perceptions across all three categories. This analysis reveals that while the brand story is perceived as strong and genuine, there may be opportunities to enhance consumer trust to align with the high levels of authenticity and engaging narrative observed. Additionally, a reliability analysis was done to evaluate the consistency of the elements within the scale, revealing a Cronbach’s Alpha value of 0.850, which implies a high level of internal consistency (see Appendix 2).

Table 2: Descriptive statistics analysis for the Authentic Brand Story

	N	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std. Deviation
Brand Storytelling: The brand’s story is clear and compelling.	112	1	4	1.63	.644
Brand Storytelling: The brand’s story makes me feel emotionally connected.	111	1	5	2.25	1.049
Brand Storytelling: The brand’s story is unique and different from other brands.	111	1	5	2.08	.992
Brand Authenticity: The brand is genuine and real.	112	1	4	1.73	.816
Brand Authenticity: The brand stays true to its values and beliefs.	112	1	4	1.81	.742
Brand Authenticity: The brand is transparent and honest in its actions.	112	1	4	1.92	.796
Consumer Trust:	112	1	5	2.12	.937

I trust this brand.					
Consumer Trust: I believe this brand would not do anything to harm its customers.	112	1	5	2.26	.918
Consumer Trust: I can rely on this brand to deliver on its promises.	112	1	5	2.05	.781
Valid N (listwise)	110				

A simple linear regression analysis was conducted to examine the direct impact of brand storytelling on consumer trust (H1). The coefficient table indicates that the unstandardized B value is 2.149, which is statistically significant ($<.001 < .05$). This value represents the average trust score when the brand storytelling score is zero – a scenario that lacks practical relevance in this context. Furthermore, the coefficient for brand storytelling is almost zero (-.001), suggesting that variations in brand storytelling scores do not predict changes in consumer trust scores. Nevertheless, the standardized beta coefficient shows a minor significant effect (-.004), indicating that brand storytelling has a minor effect on consumer trust. The very high p-value supports this conclusion (.970).

Table 2.1: *Coefficient table of the Authentic Brand Story*

Model		Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	t	Sig.
		B	Std. Error	Beta		
1	(Constant)	2.149	.176		12.190	<.001
	story	-.001	.014	-.004	-.038	.970

a. Dependent Variable: trust

The model summary reveals that brand storytelling does not account for any variability in consumer trust, indicating that it has no predictive power regarding consumer trust. This is supported by the low R-value (.004) and R-square value (.000). Additionally, the Durbin-Watson value is 1.597, suggesting minimal autocorrelation, which enhances the validity of the model's results.

Table 2.2: *Model Summary for the Authentic Brand Story*

Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate	Durbin-Watson
1	.004 ^a	.000	-.009	.77030	1.597

a. Predictors: (Constant), story
b. Dependent Variable: trust

An ANOVA analysis was conducted to examine the impact of brand storytelling (IV) on consumer trust (DV). The results indicate that brand storytelling did not significantly predict consumer trust, $F(1, 110) = .001, p = .970$. These results suggest that the regression model lacks statistical significance, strongly supporting the null hypothesis that brand storytelling does not directly impact consumer trust.

Table 2.3: ANOVA analysis of the Authentic Brand Story

Model		Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
1	Regression	.001	1	.001	.001	.970 ^b
	Residual	65.269	110	.593		
	Total	65.270	111			
a. Dependent Variable: trust						
b. Predictors: (Constant), story						

The statistical output from SPSS strongly supports the null hypothesis that the type of brand storytelling does not directly influence consumer trust. Consequently, there is no statistical evidence to reject the null hypothesis. According to the data, the outcomes related to the authentic brand story imply that even a well-crafted and engaging brand story alone does not predict or boost consumer trust. This suggests that brands should focus on factors like product quality or customer service, which might be more crucial in cultivating consumer trust.

A mediation analysis was performed to analyze H2 (the mediation effect). The model shows that 28.3% of the variance in consumer trust is accounted for by variables including brand storytelling (“story”) and brand authenticity (“authen”). The authenticity coefficient is positive and statistically significant (.614, $p < .001$), indicating that higher perceptions of brand authenticity correlate with increased consumer trust. In contrast, brand storytelling alone does not significantly impact trust, a finding consistent with previous simple linear regression results. Moreover, the interaction effect is significant ($F = 5.328, p = .023 < p = 0.05$), highlighting that the influence of the type of storytelling on trust varies with the level of perceived brand authenticity. While the direct effect of “story” on “trust” is not significant, the indirect effect of storytelling through authenticity is both positive and significant. This indicates that authenticity mediates the relationship between the type of brand storytelling and consumer trust, supporting the significant indirect effect amid a non-significant direct effect (see Appendix 4 for results of the mediation analysis).

The findings from the mediation analysis provide noteworthy support for the alternative hypothesis, suggesting rejection of the null hypothesis. These results demonstrate that although the type of brand storytelling alone may not directly impact trust, it does influence consumer trust indirectly through the mediation of brand authenticity. The analysis reveals that consumers are more likely to trust brands they perceive as authentic. Additionally, how a brand narrates its story can strengthen its perceived authenticity among consumers, thereby increasing trust.

6.1.2 The Fabricated Brand Story Study

The descriptive statistics analysis of the fabricated brand story suggests that although the brand is viewed as somewhat authentic, improvements are needed in the perception of its storytelling and in enhancing consumer trust. The significant variation in responses across all three categories underscores consumers' mixed feelings about the brand story, with some reacting positively and others negatively. Additionally, the reliability analysis revealed a Cronbach's Alpha of 0.907, demonstrating excellent internal consistency among the nine items on the scale (see Appendix 8).

Table 2.4: *Descriptive analysis of the Fabricated Brand Story*

	N	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std. Deviation
Brand Storytelling: The brand's story is clear and compelling.	100	1	5	3.49	1.219
Brand Storytelling: The brand's story makes me feel emotionally connected.	100	1	5	4.04	1.118
Brand Storytelling: The brand's story is unique and different from other brands.	100	1	5	3.81	1.346
Brand Authenticity: The brand is genuine and real.	100	1	5	3.14	1.279
Brand Authenticity: The brand stays true to its values and beliefs.	100	1	5	2.96	1.222
Brand Authenticity: The brand is transparent and honest in its actions.	100	1	5	2.70	1.251
Consumer Trust: I trust this brand.	100	1	5	3.17	1.173
Consumer Trust: I believe this brand would not do anything to harm its customers.	100	1	5	3.06	1.127
Consumer Trust: I can rely on this brand to deliver on its promises.	100	1	5	3.04	1.171
Valid N (listwise)	100				

To analyze the direct effect of the type of storytelling (independent variable) on consumer trust (dependent variable), a simple linear regression was conducted. The results show that the unstandardized regression coefficient (B) for brand storytelling is .576, with a standard error of .083, indicating that an increase of one unit in brand storytelling leads to a .576 increase in consumer trust. The standardized coefficient (Beta) of .574 demonstrates a strong effect size. Moreover, the t-statistics of 6.941 is highly significant, and a p-value of less than .001 ($.001 < 0.05$), strongly indicating that brand storytelling significantly affects consumer trust.

Table 2.5: *Coefficients of the Fabricated Brand Story*

Model		Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	t	Sig.
		B	Std. Error	Beta		
1	(Constant)	.912	.326		2.801	.006
	Brandstorytelling	.576	.083	.574	6.941	<.001
a. Dependent Variable: Consumertrust						

The model summary reveals that the R-squared value is .330, meaning that 33% of the variation in consumer trust can be attributed to the type of brand storytelling. The adjusted R-squared is slightly lower at .323. Additionally, the Durbin-Watson statistic stands at 1.628, close to the ideal value of 2, indicating no major concern about autocorrelation in the residuals.

Table 2.6: *Model Summary of the Fabricated Brand Story*

Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate	Durbin-Watson
1	.574 ^a	.330	.323	.86558	1.628
a. Predictors: (Constant), Brandstorytelling					
b. Dependent Variable: Consumertrust					

The ANOVA analysis reveals a significant effect, $F(1, 98) = 48.183$, $p < .001$, confirming the statistical significance of the model. The result underscores a strong relationship between brand storytelling and consumer trust. The residual statistics table reveals a mean close to .00, suggesting no systematic error is present. Additionally, the range of residuals and predicted values displays a reasonable spread, indicating that the model provides adequate predictions without extreme outliers (See Appendix 9).

Table 2.7: ANOVA analysis of the Fabricated Brand Story

Model		Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
1	Regression	36.100	1	36.100	48.183	<.001 ^b
	Residual	73.424	98	.749		
	Total	109.523	99			
a. Dependent Variable: Consumertrust						
b. Predictors: (Constant), Brandstorytelling						

Analyzing the SPSS output leads to the rejection of the null hypothesis (H0) that brand storytelling has no direct effect on consumer trust. Therefore, the alternative hypothesis (HA) is supported, demonstrating a significant positive impact of brand storytelling on consumer trust. This implies that enhancing or modifying brand storytelling can effectively boost consumer trust. Notably, these results, related to the fabricated brand story, reveal that a weak brand story affects consumer trust.

The mediation effect (H2) was examined through a mediation analysis. The results reveal that the total effect of storytelling on trust is significant, illustrating that storytelling alone significantly predicts consumer trust, as initially suggested by the simple linear regression analysis. Even when considering the mediator, authenticity, and storytelling significantly directly affect consumer trust, although it is reduced from the total effect. This reduction suggests that part of the influence of storytelling on consumer trust operates through brand authenticity. The table reveals that both the story coefficient (.283, $p = .001$) and authenticity coefficient (.517, $p = .000$) are significant. However, the interaction effect is not statistically significant ($F = .396$, $p = .531 > 0.05$). The model suggests that the effect of the predictor on the outcome does not significantly vary at different levels of the mediator. Moreover, the bootstrapped confidence intervals for the indirect effect range from .058 to .413 and do not include zero, confirming a significant mediation effect. This finding supports the hypothesis that brand authenticity mediates the relationship between brand storytelling and consumer trust (See Appendix 10 for mediation analysis results).

The PROCESS macro analysis provides grounds for rejecting the null hypothesis (H0) and supporting the alternative hypothesis (HA). It demonstrates that brand authenticity significantly mediates the relationship between brand storytelling and consumer trust. This mediation indicates that brand storytelling affects consumer trust partly through its influence on perceived brand authenticity. Given that these findings pertain to the fabricated or weak brand story, they underscore the critical role of authenticity in brand narrative strategies to cultivate trust among consumers.

7.0 Chapter 5: Discussion

7.1 Discussion

The analysis offers valuable insight into how different types of brand storytelling influence brand authenticity and consumer trust. By conducting and analyzing two separate studies, it was possible to effectively compare and contrast them, revealing similarities and differences in how brand storytelling impacts brand perception.

The study on authentic brand storytelling demonstrated high internal consistency yet did not find a direct significant impact of storytelling on consumer trust. Instead, the results highlight the role of brand authenticity as a critical mediator. The findings indicate that brand storytelling alone does not directly influence consumer trust; enhancing perceived brand authenticity through storytelling significantly impacts trust. This implies that the perceived authenticity of a story is more vital in building trust than simply having a narrative. Contemporary marketing research underscores that modern marketing strategies focus less on products and services and more on the experiences that brands create, providing customers with memorable stories (Moin, 2020). Nevertheless, the findings show that when brands tell stories perceived as genuine and true to their values, it enhances their authenticity.

The study on the fabricated brand story displayed excellent consistency and revealed a significant direct impact of brand storytelling on consumer trust, distinguishing it from the authentic brand story study. This strong direct relationship is supported by compelling statistical evidence. Although the mediation analysis confirmed that brand authenticity still influences the outcome, the direct effect of storytelling was notably strong and significant on its own. These findings suggest that the effectiveness of brand storytelling depends not only on authenticity but also on the strategic crafting and delivery of the story. Given that these results pertain to the fabricated brand story, compelling storytelling techniques can help overcome barriers related to trust and authenticity. In practice, balancing strategic storytelling with authenticity is essential for effectively building consumer trust. Creating distinctive narratives that emotionally resonate with consumers is crucial. The analysis revealed slightly better scores for transparency, indicating that even fabricated stories can foster some trust if they consistently convey clear and honest intentions.

The study of the authentic brand story revealed no direct impact of storytelling on consumer trust. In contrast, the fabricated brand story study found a direct effect, indicating that consumers tend to be skeptical and are less likely to trust the brand after encountering a fabricated narrative. This reflects broader findings that consumers today are increasingly skeptical. Another study emphasizes the role of consumer suspicion and skepticism in shaping perceptions of a retailer's image, loyalty, and likelihood of recommendation. For instance, when consumers doubt the authenticity of a brand's sustainability claims, it can be harmful (Lavorata, 2020). Similarly, if a brand's story appears dishonest or inconsistent with its values, it can foster skepticism. However, when consumers are exposed to an authentic brand story, it does not significantly enhance trust, suggesting that they react unfavorably to what they perceive as unauthentic or misleading. As previously mentioned, skepticism serves as a defense mechanism against misleading marketing tactics

(Koslow, 2020), a characteristic often associated with fabricated stories. These findings highlight how crucial transparency and authenticity are in brand communications, highlighting that genuine and truthful storytelling is crucial for building trust.

Crespo et al. (2023) propose that engaging stories strengthen consumer-brand relationships by encouraging mental involvement through brand identification and stirring emotions through brand involvement. This study observed that the authentic brand story, rich in narrative elements, has a stronger persuasive effect than the fabricated brand story, which lacked these elements. This supports the theory that narratives, which are processed more efficiently than non-narratives, are more persuasive, as detailed by Bullock et al. (2021).

The comparison between the two studies highlights the nuanced impact of brand stories on consumer perception. The authentic brand story emphasizes the importance of authenticity, while the fabricated brand story demonstrates that storytelling alone can directly influence consumer trust. These findings suggest that authenticity and effective storytelling are crucial, yet their effects can vary significantly based on initial consumer perceptions and the brand's strategic approach. Furthermore, the results reveal that authenticity is fundamental to building consumer trust. However, strategic storytelling techniques, particularly those emphasizing transparency and consistency, can still foster a degree of trust even for less authentic stories. Ultimately, brands should strive to deliver genuine, distinctive narratives that emotionally resonate with consumers to build and maintain lasting trust.

7.2 Theoretical & Managerial Implications

The discussion section underscores the crucial balance between authenticity and strategic storytelling. The study reveals that authenticity remains vital for building consumer trust. However, strategic storytelling techniques like transparency and consistency can mitigate skepticism, even in less authentic narratives. Specifically, the fabricated brand story significantly impacted trust and authenticity, highlighting consumer skepticism toward less engaging and emotionally disconnected brand stories.

Analyzing these factors provides valuable insight for managers, enabling them to craft brand stories aligned with core brand values and beliefs while ensuring message consistency across all touchpoints. Fostering credibility and trust through transparent communication is essential. Given the highlighted skepticism among today's consumers, managers can proactively address potential concerns by being open about brand intentions, practices, and values. This transparency can be achieved by monitoring consumer sentiment and adjusting messaging to maintain authenticity and consistency.

The results of the authentic brand story elicited stronger emotional responses, leading to increased consumer engagement and trust. Therefore, investing in emotionally compelling narratives that resonate with the target audience is essential. Based on the two studies, brands should distinguish themselves by ensuring their storytelling reflects their unique value propositions that resonate with their audience.

Furthermore, maintaining consistency across channels is essential for upholding trust and credibility. Ensure the brand's storytelling remains consistent across various marketing platforms, including social

media, websites, and customer support. This consistency can help reduce skepticism among consumers. While tailoring the narrative style to each platform is crucial, preserving the core brand values is equally important for maintaining trust and authenticity.

Consumer preferences and perceptions are dynamic, often changing over time (Zhang & Chang, 2021). Therefore, brands should consistently monitor consumer sentiment and feedback to measure the effectiveness of their storytelling. This data can be leveraged to refine narratives and address emerging concerns or trends. Consumer feedback offers valuable insight into how the brand's stories are perceived, and incorporating this feedback can increase the authenticity and credibility of the brand narrative. The comparison between the two studies highlighted skepticism toward the fabricated brand story, emphasizing the importance of understanding the target audience and preventing similar skepticism. Feedback from consumers can play a pivotal role in achieving this by helping brands better understand their audience and shape narratives that resonate more effectively.

Managers must recognize that while authenticity is crucial, strategic storytelling plays a significant role in shaping consumer trust and brand perception. By blending authenticity with compelling storytelling techniques, brands can craft distinctive narratives that resonate emotionally with consumers, fostering stronger consumer-brand relationships and long-term loyalty.

7.3 Limitations & Further Research

Some limitations were identified in this research that may impact the validity and generalizability of the findings, offering opportunities for further research in this field.

Firstly, the two brand stories were associated with different products, which could have led to varied responses if the brand stories had centered on the same product. This inconsistency might have influenced respondents' answers and potentially affected the study's results. Moreover, the sample sizes were relatively small, with 100 respondents for the fabricated brand story and 112 for the authentic brand story. These limited sample sizes may not adequately represent the broader consumer population. This underscores the need for future research to utilize larger sample sizes and investigate specific age groups and nationalities to identify differences in brand storytelling perceptions. It would be beneficial to explore cultural differences and assess their impact on perceptions of brand storytelling, authenticity, and trust.

The descriptive analysis showed that respondents predominantly "strongly agree" with positive perceptions of the brand stories. However, interpretations may be skewed due to social desirability bias without controlling for this bias or providing a broader range of respondents (Nikopoilou, 2023). This bias could have influenced the respondents' answers, thus affecting the study's overall findings.

Additionally, the analysis focused primarily on the direct relationship between variables but did not account for other potential factors, such as brand loyalty, product quality, and past experiences. Future research could control for these factors to better isolate the effect of storytelling and authenticity on consumer trust. Nevertheless, consumer trust may also be influenced by several unmeasured variables, such

as brand reputation, customer service, and value proposition, which were not considered in this study. This gap weakens the conclusion that storytelling alone, or through authenticity, directly impacts consumer trust.

Future research could also explore specific market sectors, such as the fashion, jewelry, and food industries, to understand how storytelling and authenticity impact consumer trust in various market contexts. Additionally, tracking how perceptions of storytelling and authenticity impact consumer trust over time could offer a more dynamic understanding of these relationships. By considering these directions for further research, future studies can address the limitations of this study and provide a more comprehensive understanding of the impact of brand storytelling on authenticity and consumer trust.

7.4 Conclusion

The key findings of this study show how consumer trust is affected by both authentic and fabricated brand storytelling, along with a comparison of the two and their broader implications.

The study on the authentic brand story demonstrated high internal consistency yet revealed no direct significant impact on consumer trust. Instead, the influence of storytelling on trust operates through the mediation of brand authenticity. According to this research, storytelling alone does not directly build trust; it plays a crucial role in enhancing the perception of authenticity, which is essential for fostering trust.

In contrast, the fabricated brand story study showed a significant direct impact on consumer trust, differentiating it from the authentic story study. Despite this positive impact, such stories often lead to consumer skepticism when the narrative's authenticity is questioned. However, if they consistently convey clear and honest intentions, these stories can still foster a degree of trust, as indicated by slightly better transparency scores.

The comparison between the two types of storytelling strategies highlights that authentic stories increase a brand's authenticity but do not directly impact trust, suggesting a consumer pushback against what they perceive as unauthentic or misleading. On the other hand, fabricated stories directly impact consumer trust, and they risk fostering skepticism if perceived as dishonest or inconsistent with the brand's values.

The findings underscore the critical role of authenticity and transparency in brand storytelling. Genuine and truthful narratives are crucial for building trust. Strategic storytelling that appears transparent and consistent can also build trust, but it is less effective than narratives rooted in true authenticity. These insights suggest that to build consumer trust effectively; brands must focus on delivering honest and consistent stories that resonate with their core values.

This research emphasizes the complex relationship between brand storytelling, authenticity, and consumer trust. It reveals that while authenticity is crucial, the influence of a well-crafted narrative should be noticed. These findings enrich the broader conversation on marketing strategies, providing actionable insights for brands seeking to build consumer trust through storytelling. Understanding this relationship enables brands to create narratives that are both true to their identity and compelling to their audience.

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Appendixes

Appendix 1: Survey

Dear Participant, Thank you for taking the time to contribute to this survey. Your valuable insights will greatly assist in enhancing the understanding of brand storytelling and its impact on consumer trust and brand authenticity.

This survey will only take a couple of minutes of your time. Your participation provides invaluable insights into the relationship between brand storytelling, authenticity perception, and consumer trust, enriching the findings of this master thesis.

In this survey, you will be presented with a brand story, followed by several statements related to the storytelling, authenticity, and your trust in the brand based on the story. You will be asked to rate your agreement with each statement on a 5-point Likert scale, ranging from "Strongly Agree" to "Strongly Disagree."

Your participation is highly appreciated, and your responses will remain confidential and will solely be used for academic purposes.

Thank you

Section 1:

Please read the following paragraph about the brand (Group A and B will get two different stories)

Section 2: Brand Storytelling

On a scale of 1-5 (1 being "Strongly Agree" and 5 being "Strongly Disagree"), please rate your agreement with the following statements:

	Strongly agree	Somewhat agree	Neither agree nor disagree	Somewhat disagree	Strongly disagree
The brand's story is clear and compelling.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
The brand's story makes me feel emotionally connected.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
The brand's story is unique and different from other brands.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

Section 3: Brand Authenticity

On a scale of 1-5 (1 being "Strongly Agree" and 5 being "Strongly Disagree"), please rate your agreement with the following statements:

	Strongly agree	Somewhat agree	Neither agree nor disagree	Somewhat disagree	Strongly disagree
The brand is genuine and real.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
The brand stays true to its values and beliefs.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
The brand is transparent and honest in its actions.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

Section 4: Consumer trust

On a scale of 1-5 (1 being “Strongly Agree” and 5 being “Strongly Disagree”), please rate your agreement with the following statements:

	Strongly agree	Somewhat agree	Neither agree nor disagree	Somewhat disagree	Strongly disagree
I trust this brand.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I believe this brand would not do anything to harm its customers.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I can rely on this brand to deliver on its promises.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

Section 5: Demographics

Please provide your age, gender, and where you are from. (This information will be used for research purposes only and will remain confidential.)

Age

- Under 18
- 18 - 24
- 25 - 34
- 35 - 44
- 45 - 54
- 55 - 64
- 65 or above

Gender

- Male
- Female
- Prefer not to say

Where you are from

Thank you for your participation!

The Authentic Brand Story:

Appendix 2: Reliability Statistics for the Authentic Brand Story

Cronbach's Alpha	N of Items
.850	9

Appendix 3: Residuals Statistics of the Authentic Brand Story

	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std. Deviation	N
Predicted Value	2.1404	2.1484	2.1429	.00275	112
Residual	-1.14195	2.19227	.00000	.76682	112
Std. Predicted Value	-.912	2.002	.000	1.000	112
Std. Residual	-1.482	2.846	.000	.995	112

Appendix 4: Mediation Analysis of the Authentic Brand Story

Run MATRIX procedure:

***** PROCESS Procedure for SPSS Version 4.2

Written by Andrew F. Hayes, Ph.D. www.afhayes.com
Documentation available in Hayes (2022).
www.guilford.com/p/hayes3

Model : 4
Y : trust
X : story
M : authen

Sample
Size: 112

OUTCOME VARIABLE:
authen

Model Summary

	R	R-sq	MSE	F	df1
df2	p				
	.041	.002	.446	.182	1.000
110.000		.670			

Model

	coeff	se	t	p	LLCI
ULCI					
constant	1.762	.153	11.534	.000	1.459
2.065					
story	.005	.012	.427	.670	-.019
.030					

Standardized coefficients

coeff
story .041

OUTCOME VARIABLE:
trust

Model Summary

df2	R	R-sq	MSE	F	df1
	p				
109.000	.532	.283	.429	21.510	2.000
	.000				

Model

	coeff	se	t	p	LLCI
ULCI					
constant	1.067	.223	4.788	.000	.625
1.509					
story	-.004	.012	-.311	.756	-.028
.020					
authen	.614	.094	6.559	.000	.428
.799					

Standardized coefficients

coeff
story -.025
authen .532

Test(s) of X by M interaction:

F	df1	df2	p
5.328	1.000	108.000	.023

***** TOTAL EFFECT MODEL

OUTCOME VARIABLE:
trust

Model Summary

df2	R	R-sq	MSE	F	df1
	p				
110.000	.004	.000	.593	.001	1.000
	.970				

Model	coeff	se	t	p	LLCI
ULCI					
constant	2.149	.176	12.190	.000	1.800
2.498					
story	-.001	.014	-.038	.970	-.029
.028					

Standardized coefficients

	coeff
story	-.004

***** TOTAL, DIRECT, AND INDIRECT EFFECTS OF X ON Y *****

***** TOTAL, DIRECT, AND INDIRECT EFFECTS OF X ON Y *****

Total effect of X on Y

ULCI	Effect	se	t	p	LLCI
	c_cs				
	-.001	.014	-.038	.970	-.029
.028	-.004				

Direct effect of X on Y

ULCI	Effect	se	t	p	LLCI
	c'_cs				
	-.004	.012	-.311	.756	-.028
.020	-.025				

Indirect effect(s) of X on Y:

authen	Effect	BootSE	BootLLCI	BootULCI
	.003	.007	-.011	.017

Completely standardized indirect effect(s) of X on Y:

authen	Effect	BootSE	BootLLCI	BootULCI
	.022	.045	-.072	.106

***** ANALYSIS NOTES AND ERRORS *****

Level of confidence for all confidence intervals in output:
95.0000

Number of bootstrap samples for percentile bootstrap confidence intervals:
5000

----- END MATRIX -----

Appendix 5: Frequency analysis of the age of the Authentic Brand Story

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	18-24	29	24.2	25.9	25.9
	25 - 34	29	24.2	25.9	51.8
	35 - 44	34	28.3	30.4	82.1
	45 - 54	5	4.2	4.5	86.6
	55 - 64	8	6.7	7.1	93.8
	65 or above	7	5.8	6.3	100.0
	Total	112	93.3	100.0	
Missing	System	8	6.7		
Total		120	100.0		

Appendix 6: Frequency Analysis of the gender of the Authentic Brand Story

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Male	50	41.7	44.6	44.6
	Female	61	50.8	54.5	99.1
	Prefer not to say	1	.8	.9	100.0
	Total	112	93.3	100.0	
Missing	System	8	6.7		
Total		120	100.0		

Appendix 7: Frequency Analysis of the demographic location of the Authentic Brand Story

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid		8	6.7	6.7	6.7
	America.	1	.8	.8	7.5
	Australia	1	.8	.8	8.3
	California	2	1.7	1.7	10.0
	Charlotte, North Carolina, USA	1	.8	.8	10.8
	Chicago, IL	1	.8	.8	11.7
	Cincinnati Ohio USA	1	.8	.8	12.5
	citrus spring, florida	1	.8	.8	13.3
	Colorado, USA	1	.8	.8	14.2
	Connecticut	1	.8	.8	15.0
	England, United Kingdom	1	.8	.8	15.8
	FL	1	.8	.8	16.7
	florida	1	.8	.8	17.5
	Florida	1	.8	.8	18.3

GA - USA	1	.8	.8	19.2
I live in New York	1	.8	.8	20.0
Illinois	1	.8	.8	20.8
IN	1	.8	.8	21.7
Ireland	1	.8	.8	22.5
Kansas	1	.8	.8	23.3
Kentucky, USA	1	.8	.8	24.2
Maryland USA	1	.8	.8	25.0
michigan	1	.8	.8	25.8
Missouri	1	.8	.8	26.7
NC, USA	1	.8	.8	27.5
New Jersey	1	.8	.8	28.3
New York	2	1.7	1.7	30.0
new york, unites states	1	.8	.8	30.8
Norman, Oklahoma, USA	1	.8	.8	31.7
norway	20	16.7	16.7	48.3
Norway	4	3.3	3.3	51.7
Norwey	1	.8	.8	52.5
Ohio	1	.8	.8	53.3
Oregon	1	.8	.8	54.2
Originally from Indiana. Now living in Ohio. Thank you for the opportunity to work with you!	1	.8	.8	55.0
Rhode Island USA	1	.8	.8	55.8
sc	1	.8	.8	56.7
South Carolina, USA	1	.8	.8	57.5
Spain	1	.8	.8	58.3
Texas	2	1.7	1.7	60.0
UK	2	1.7	1.7	61.7
United Kingdom	1	.8	.8	62.5
United State	1	.8	.8	63.3
United States	14	11.7	11.7	75.0
United States (IL)	1	.8	.8	75.8
United States of America	1	.8	.8	76.7
US	2	1.7	1.7	78.3
usa	2	1.7	1.7	80.0
USA	23	19.2	19.2	99.2
Virginia	1	.8	.8	100.0
Total	120	100.0	100.0	

The Fabricated Brand Story

Appendix 8: Reliability Analysis of the Fabricated Brand Story

Cronbach's Alpha	N of Items
.907	9

Appendix 9: Residuals Statistics of the Fabricated Brand Story

	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std. Deviation	N
Predicted Value	1.6801	3.7930	3.0900	.60386	100
Residual	-2.26760	2.65321	.00000	.86119	100
Std. Predicted Value	-2.335	1.164	.000	1.000	100
Std. Residual	-2.620	3.065	.000	.995	100
a. Dependent Variable: Consumertrust					

Appendix 10: Mediation Analysis of the Fabricated Brand Story

Run MATRIX procedure:

***** PROCESS Procedure for SPSS Version 4.2

Written by Andrew F. Hayes, Ph.D. www.afhayes.com
Documentation available in Hayes (2022).
www.guilford.com/p/hayes3

Model : 4
Y : Trust
X : Story
M : Authen

Sample
Size: 100

OUTCOME VARIABLE:
Authen

Model Summary

	R	R-sq	MSE	F	df1
df2	p				
98.000	.530	.281	.908	38.372	1.000
	.000				

Model

	coeff	se	t	p	LLCI
ULCI					
constant	.794	.358	2.216	.029	.083
1.505					
Story	.566	.091	6.194	.000	.385
.747					

Standardized coefficients

	coeff
Story	.530

OUTCOME VARIABLE:
 Trust

Model Summary

	R	R-sq	MSE	F	df1
df2	p				
	.740	.547	.511	58.588	2.000
97.000	.000				

Model

	coeff	se	t	p	LLCI
ULCI					
constant	.501	.276	1.818	.072	-.046
1.048					
Story	.283	.081	3.502	.001	.123
.444					
Authen	.517	.076	6.825	.000	.367
.668					

Standardized coefficients

	coeff
Story	.282
Authen	.550

Test(s) of X by M interaction:

F	df1	df2	p
.396	1.000	96.000	.531

***** TOTAL EFFECT MODEL

OUTCOME VARIABLE:
 Trust

Model Summary

	R	R-sq	MSE	F	df1
df2	p				
	.574	.330	.749	48.183	1.000
98.000	.000				

Model

	coeff	se	t	p	LLCI
ULCI					
constant	.912	.326	2.801	.006	.266
1.558					
Story	.576	.083	6.941	.000	.412
.741					

Standardized coefficients

	coeff
Story	.574

***** TOTAL, DIRECT, AND INDIRECT EFFECTS OF X ON Y

Total effect of X on Y

Effect	se	t	p	LLCI	ULCI
.576	.083	6.941	.000	.412	.741
.574					

Direct effect of X on Y

Effect	se	t	p	LLCI	ULCI
.283	.081	3.502	.001	.123	.444
.282					

Indirect effect(s) of X on Y:

Effect	BootSE	BootLLCI	BootULCI
.293	.061	.174	.413

Completely standardized indirect effect(s) of X on Y:

Effect	BootSE	BootLLCI	BootULCI
.292	.058	.176	.402

***** ANALYSIS NOTES AND ERRORS

Level of confidence for all confidence intervals in output:
95.0000

Number of bootstrap samples for percentile bootstrap confidence intervals:
5000

----- END MATRIX -----

Appendix 11: Frequency analysis of the age of the Fabricated Brand Story

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	18 - 24	26	25.7	26.0	26.0
	25 - 34	26	25.7	26.0	52.0
	35 - 44	28	27.7	28.0	80.0
	45 - 54	13	12.9	13.0	93.0
	55 - 64	6	5.9	6.0	99.0
	65 or above	1	1.0	1.0	100.0
	Total	100	99.0	100.0	
Missing	System	1	1.0		
Total		101	100.0		

Appendix 12: Frequency analysis of the gender of the Fabricated Brand Story

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Male	50	49.5	50.0	50.0
	Female	50	49.5	50.0	100.0
	Total	100	99.0	100.0	
Missing	System	1	1.0		
Total		101	100.0		

Appendix 13: Frequency analysis of the demographic location of the Fabricated Brand Story

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid		1	1.0	1.0	1.0
	32	1	1.0	1.0	2.0
	Albuquerque, NM, USA	1	1.0	1.0	3.0
	America	1	1.0	1.0	4.0
	baltimore, Maryland	1	1.0	1.0	5.0
	Blairsville, Georgia	1	1.0	1.0	5.9
	Brooklyn	1	1.0	1.0	6.9
	Canada	2	2.0	2.0	8.9
	Clover, SC	1	1.0	1.0	9.9
	Connecticut	1	1.0	1.0	10.9
	Florida	2	2.0	2.0	12.9
	Florida USA	1	1.0	1.0	13.9
	GA, USA	1	1.0	1.0	14.9
	Hong Kong	1	1.0	1.0	15.8
	Houston, TX, USA	1	1.0	1.0	16.8
	illinois	1	1.0	1.0	17.8

Indiana, US	1	1.0	1.0	18.8
Massachusetts	1	1.0	1.0	19.8
michigan	1	1.0	1.0	20.8
Michigan	1	1.0	1.0	21.8
Nebraska	1	1.0	1.0	22.8
New Jersey	2	2.0	2.0	24.8
New york	1	1.0	1.0	25.7
North Carolina	1	1.0	1.0	26.7
norway	8	7.9	7.9	34.7
Norway	7	6.9	6.9	41.6
NY	2	2.0	2.0	43.6
Pa	1	1.0	1.0	44.6
pittsburgh PA	1	1.0	1.0	45.5
Sioux Falls	1	1.0	1.0	46.5
South Carolina, USA	1	1.0	1.0	47.5
South Korea	1	1.0	1.0	48.5
texas	2	2.0	2.0	50.5
Texas	2	2.0	2.0	52.5
Texas, United States	1	1.0	1.0	53.5
Texas, USA	1	1.0	1.0	54.5
UK	2	2.0	2.0	56.4
Unietd states	1	1.0	1.0	57.4
United Kingdom	1	1.0	1.0	58.4
united states	1	1.0	1.0	59.4
United States	10	9.9	9.9	69.3
United States (NY)	1	1.0	1.0	70.3
United States of America	3	3.0	3.0	73.3
US	4	4.0	4.0	77.2
usa	3	3.0	3.0	80.2
USA	17	16.8	16.8	97.0
USA, Minnesota	1	1.0	1.0	98.0
Virginia	1	1.0	1.0	99.0
York, PA - 17404	1	1.0	1.0	100.0
Total	101	100.0	100.0	